

American Political Institutions in Uncertain Times

Political Science 120C: Spring 2017

Tuesday and Thursday: 1:30 PM – 2:50 PM in Room 200-205

Instructor

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Office Hours: Thursday 3:00-5:00 PM (and by appointment).

Course Objectives

With partisan polarization at historical highs, Congressional approval at historical lows, and a gridlocked Congress routinely pushed to the brink by failed negotiations, political dysfunction has become a defining feature of contemporary American politics. This course will take an institutional approach to understanding the current state of American politics. We will analyze models of how the rules that govern the policy process—*institutions*—affect how instrumental and motivated politicians—ambitious actors—compete for their preferred policy outcomes. Coupled with this analytical framework for understanding politics, students will develop a deeper understanding of contemporary policy disputes and learn to place them in historical context. The result will be a better understanding of who determines policy, how laws are constructed, and how the interaction of political actors across institutions determines political outcomes.

This course is offered as a Writing in the Major (WIM) course. Students should plan to develop writing skills throughout the quarter. As instructors, we plan to read each paper for both content—what you say about politics—and style—how you say it. In both section and in class, we will offer guidance on how to improve both components of your writing.

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites. The best students will have a strong understanding of American civics.

Evaluation

- Paper 1: Congress: 20%
 - Initial draft due: **April 27**
 - Final draft due: **May 4**
- Paper 2: Separation-of-Powers: 20%
 - Initial draft due: **May 11**
 - Final draft due: **May 18**
- Paper 3: The Courts: 20%
 - Initial draft due: **May 25**
 - Final draft due: **June 1**
- Final Exam: 25%
- Participation: 15%

Papers

You will write three papers over the quarter. The papers will use the theoretical ideas introduced in class to answer a broad question. Students should use standard formatting, font size, and text color for all assignments. Each paper will be turned in twice. You will turn in a first version of the paper on each of the assigned dates and the grade given to this paper will constitute 1/3 of the grade for the assignment. Note, these are not first drafts of the papers. Rather, they should be carefully edited and proof-read before submission. The second version of the paper is due one week later (we will provide a prompt grading of the papers). This final version is worth 2/3 of the grade for the assignment. This should represent a substantial revision of both the substance and style of the first version of the paper.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk; phone: (650) 723-1066; web site <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oea>.

Required readings

Most of the class readings will be posted on Coursework. The following readings are available at the bookstore.

- 1) Stewart, Charles. *Analyzing Congress* (2nd Edition). ISBN-10: 039393506X
- 2) Mann, Thomas and Norman Ornstein. *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*, ISBN-10: 0465074731

[The class schedule is subject to change]

Course Outline

Section 1: Introduction

Tuesday, April 4

What's Wrong with American Government?

Thursday, April 6

Why Political Institutions Matter?

- Francis Fukuyama, "The Decay of American Political Institutions" [Coursework]
- Terry Moe, "Political Institutions: The Neglected Side of the Story" [Coursework]

Tuesday, April 11

The Seeds of Political Dysfunction

- Mann and Ornstein, Ch. 1-3

Section 2: Congress

Thursday, April 13

Conceptualizing Congress

- Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, chs. 1,3
- Kenneth Shepsle, “Rational Choice Institutionalism” [Coursework]
- Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Ideology and Congress*, ch. 2 [Coursework]

Tuesday, April 18

Parties, Power, and Policy Bias

- Fed. 51 and Fed. 10 [Coursework]
- Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, ch. 7
- John Aldrich, “Political Parties In and Out of Legislatures” [Coursework]

Thursday, April 20

Agenda Setting: The Hidden Way in Which Parties Manipulate Outcomes

- Gary Cox and Matthew McCubbins, *Setting the Agenda* [Coursework]
- William Riker, “Exploiting the Powell Amendment” [Coursework]

Tuesday, April 25

Conceptualizing Institutional Politics II: Separation-of-Powers Models/Pivotal Politics

- Rui J. P. de Figueiredo, Tonja Jacobi, Barry R. Weingast: The New Separation-of-Powers Approach to American Politics. [Coursework]
- Keith Krehbiel, *Pivotal Politics: A Theory of U.S. Lawmaking*, ch. 2-3 [Coursework]

Section 3: The Executive and Bureaucracy

Thursday, April 27

Executive Authority

- Terry Moe, “Presidents, Institutions, and Theory,” ch. 6 [Coursework]
- William Howell, “Executives—The American Presidency” [Coursework]
- (Optional) Charles Cameron and Nolan McCarty, “Models of Vetoes and Veto Bargaining,” *Annual Review of Political Science* [Coursework]

Tuesday, May 2

The Imperial Presidency: Presidents, Congress, and War

- Matthew Baum, “How Public Opinion Constrains the Use of Force: The Case of Operation Restore Hope” [Coursework]
- William Howell and John Pevehouse, “Separation of Powers and the Use of Military Force” [Coursework]
- Epstein, Ho, King, and Segal, “The Effect of War on the Supreme Court” [Coursework]

Thursday, May 4

Are Bureaucracies “Designed to Fail”? and why are they so inefficient?

- Terry Moe, “The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure” [Coursework]
- Mathew D. McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz, “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms” [Coursework]
- John D. Huber, Charles R. Shipan, “Politics, Delegation, and Bureaucracy” [Coursework]

Section 4: The Judiciary

Tuesday, May 9

The Supreme Court: Independent of Politics – or Politicians with Different Powers?

- *Marbury v. Madison* [Coursework]
- Lee Epstein, “The U.S. Supreme Court.” [Coursework]
- Martin Shapiro, “The Constitution and Economic Rights” [Coursework] (Optional)

Thursday, May 11

Are Judge’s Really Just Legislators in Robes?

- Mathew D. McCubbins and Daniel B. Rodriguez, The Judiciary and the Role of Law [Coursework]
- Jeffrey A. Segal, “Judicial Behavior” [Coursework]
- John Ferejohn, “Judicializing Politics, Politicizing Law” [Coursework]

Tuesday, May 16

The “American Aristocracy:” The Role of Lawyers in American Politics

- Excerpts from Alexis De Tocqueville, “Democracy In America” [Coursework]
- Benjamin Barton, excerpts from “The Lawyer-Judge Bias in the American Legal System” [Coursework]
- Maya Sen, “How Judicial Qualification Ratings May Disadvantage Minority and Female Candidates” [Coursework]

Section 5: Representation

Thursday, May 18

Democracy and Inequality

- Bonica et al., “Why Hasn’t Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality?” [Coursework]

Tuesday, May 23

Money in Politics

- Ansolabehere, de Figureido, and Snyder, “Why is There So Little Money in Politics?”
- McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, “Campaign Finance and Polarization”, in *Polarized America*.

Thursday, May 25

No Class

Tuesday, May 30

Representation and Electoral Institutions: How Gerrymandering, Ballot Access, and Partisan Primaries Constrain Voter Choice and Shape Electoral Outcomes

- Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, ch. 6
- James Fearon, "Electoral accountability and the control of politicians: selecting good types versus sanctioning poor performance" [Coursework]
- (Optional) Jowei Chen and Jonathan Rodden, "*Using Legislative Districting Simulations to Measure Electoral Bias in Legislatures*" [Coursework]

Thursday, June 1

Who Runs for Congress?

- Charles Stewart, *Analyzing Congress*, ch. 4
- Nick Carnes, "Does the Numerical Underrepresentation of the Working Class in Congress Matter?" [Coursework]
- Adam Bonica, "Professional Networks, Early Fundraising, and Electoral Success" [Coursework]

Tuesday, June 6

Case Study: The Continuing Saga of Health Care Reform

- No Readings